

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DHA-02 ACDA-07 CIAE-00
COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 EB-08 FMC-01 INR-07
NSAE-00 SAL-01 CG-00 DLOS-06 OES-06 PM-04 H-01
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
AID-05 TRSE-00 FEA-01 SIL-01 LAB-04 SCS-03 SCA-01
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-----182248Z 123402 /14

R 182050Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6997
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS
AMEMBASSY VIENNA
USCINCLANT NORFOLK VA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ENRG, PINS, PINT, PORG, OPEC, US, VE
SUBJECT: THIS WEEK IN VENEZUELA

REF: CARACAS 2544 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: BRAZILIANS ANNOYED BY PEREZ SPEECH PRAISING
PRESIDENT CARTER'S STAND ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND NON-
PROLIFERATION. MERCHANT MARINE STRIKE SET FOR
MARCH 21. OPEC MEETING UNLIKELY BEFORE MAY. NIEHOUS
INVESTIGATION CONTINUES. UNITY OF THE LEFT PROPOSED.

1. PEREZ, HUMAN RIGHTS, NON-PROLIFERATION AND BRAZIL.
PRESIDENT PEREZ' ANNUAL ADDRESS TO THE CONGRESS
MARCH 11 GENERATED LOCAL PRESS SPECULATION THAT THE
BRAZILIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY WAS MIFFED BECAUSE OF
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PEREZ' STRONG SUPPORT FOR U.S. NUCLEAR
NON-PROLIFERATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS POLICIES
(CARACAS 2641). THE CARACAS PRESS PLAYED UP
STORIES FROM BRASILIA TO THE EFFECT THAT PEREZ'
REFERENCES COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THE TWO COUNTRIES'
RELATIONS AND THAT BRAZILIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SILVEIRA
HAD CANCELLED A SCHEDULED TRIP TO CARACAS FOR EARLY

APRIL. ON MARCH 17 THE LOCAL PRESS CARRIED DENIALS FROM THE BRAZILIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY THAT SILVEIRA HAD POSTPONED HIS VISIT TO CARACAS SINCE NONE HAD BEEN SCHEDULED. COMMENT: PEREZ' SUPPORT OF BOTH NON-PROLIFERATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT NEW POLICY INITIATIVES, BOTH HAVING BEEN ENUNCIATED PUBLICLY ON OTHER OCCASIONS BY HIM, AND BY HIS GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, PEREZ' PUBLIC SUPPORT OF US INITIATIVES IN THESE AREAS OBVIOUSLY TOUCHED A RAW NERVE IN BRAZIL. QUITE ASIDE FROM THE FACT THAT VENEZUELAN CAN ILL CONCEAL THEIR PLEASURE AT BEING ABLE TO TWIT THEIR LARGE NEIGHBOR, NON-PROLIFERATION IS A GENUINE CONCERN OF THE PEREZ ADMINISTRATION. IN PARTICULAR, CONCERN ABOUT A POSSIBLE FUTURE BRAZILIAN NUCLEAR CAPABILITY REINFORCES TRADITIONAL AND DEEP-SEATED VENEZUELAN SUSPICIONS THAT BRAZIL ASPIRES TO BE A CARIBBEAN POWER AND COVETS VENEZUELA'S NATURAL RESOURCES. FURTHER, SINCE RETURNING TO DEMOCRACY AFTER THE OVERTHROW OF DICTATOR PEREZ JIMENEZ IN 1958, VENEZUELA HAS SEEN ITSELF SLOWLY REDUCED TO BEING ALMOST THE SOLE DEFENDER OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH AMERICA. NOW, THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION HAS GIVEN VENEZUELA DRAMATIC ENCOURAGEMENT TO EMPHASIZE ITS VALUES AND VIEWS. THE PEREZ ADMINISTRATION WILL SEEK OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO DO SO. OUR POLITICAL CONTACTS STRESS THAT ALL POLITICAL PARTIES SUPPORT PRESIDENT PEREZ CHAMPIONING OF THESE ISSUES AND WELCOME PRESIDENT CARTER'S INITIATIVES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN (COPEI) PARTY, BECAUSE OF ITS LINKS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEMOCRATS IN CHILE, IS DELIGHTED BY THESE DEVELOPMENTS AND HUNGRY FOR MORE. FOREIGN MINISTER ESCOBAR TOLD BOTH THE AMBASSADOR AND CONGRESSMAN VANIK (D.-OHIO) THIS WEEK THAT GOV IS VERY PLEASED THAT US FOREIGN POLICY ONCE MORE HAS AN IDEALOGICAL AND MORAL CONTENT. THE INFORMATION MINISTER ALSO SAID PUBLICLY THIS WEEK THAT VENEZUELA IS PLEASED THE US SHARES ITS DEVOTION TO THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS. REGARDING POSTPONEMENT OF SILVEIRA'S TRIP, WE BELIEVE THE EXACT DATE HAD NOT BEEN SET. WE DO KNOW, HOWEVER, FROM A BRAZILIAN EMBASSY SOURCE THAT THE FIRST DAYS OF APRIL WERE AMONG THE DATES UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR 1977 VISIT BY SILVEIRA.

2. IMPENDING MERCHANT MARINE STRIKE. THE VENEZUELAN MERCHANT MARINE HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL GO ON STRIKE THE WEEK OF MARCH 21-25 TO PROTEST THE FACT THAT THE MAJOR MERCHANT MARINE OPERATIONS ARE HEADED BY CAREER

NAVAL OFFICERS INSTEAD OF MERCHANT MARINE PERSONNEL.
MERCHANT MARINE OFFICERS ARE SCHEDULED TO STRIKE
ON MONDAY, FOLLOWED BY FURTHER ESCALATION WITH OTHER
MARINE AFFILIATED GROUPS JOINING IN AS EACH DAY
GOES BY WITHOUT A SETTLEMENT. BY THE END OF THE
WEEK, THE PORT PILOTS PLAN TO JOIN THE STRIKE, WHICH
COULD CAUSE THE MAJOR VENEZUELAN PORTS TO BE VIRTUALLY
PARALYZED. VIVAS CASANOVA, MINISTER OF TRANSPORT
AND COMMUNICATIONS, ANNOUNCED THAT THE GOV WILL NOT
NEGOTIATE WITH THE MERCHANT MARINE OFFICERS UNLESS

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THEY DROP THEIR STRIKE PLANS. IN ADDITION, THE
VENEZUELAN NAVY IS MAKING CONTINGENCY PLANS
ALTHOUGH ITS ABILITY TO HANDLE A MAJOR
STRIKE IS LIMITED. THE AD CONTROLLED CONFEDERATION
OF VENEZUELAN WORKERS (CTV) HAS ANNOUNCED IT WILL
NOT SUPPORT A STRIKE BY MERCHANT MARINE OFFICERS.
THE COPEI CONTROLLED LA GUAIRA DOCK WORKERS SAY
THEY WILL SUPPORT THE SHIPS' OFFICERS. THUS THE
DISPUTE MAY ASSUME A POLITICAL CHARACTER. WHILE
A STOPPAGE MAY WELL TAKE PLACE ON MONDAY, SIMILAR DISPUTES OVER
THE ADVISABILITY OF A STRIKE ACTION

HAVE OFTEN LED TO THE POSTPONEMENT OF DEADLINES.

3. OPEC MEETING UNLIKELY BEFORE MAY. MINISTER OF ENERGY AND MINES VALENTINE HERNANDEZ TOLD THE PRESS THAT AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF OPEC MINISTERS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE HELD PRIOR TO PRESIDENT PEREZ' INTENDED VISIT TO IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, AND OTHER MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES IN LATE APRIL. HERNANDEZ ALSO DISCOUNTED THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE WOULD BE VISITING THE AREA SEPARATELY IN AN ATTEMPT TO ARRANGE SUCH A MEETING, BUT CONTINUED TO MAINTAIN THAT ONE SHOULD BE HELD BEFORE JULY. ANOTHER SOURCE IN THE MINISTRY TOLD EMBOFFS MEETING WAS UNLIKELY BEFORE LATE MAY.

4. NIEHOUS INVESTIGATION CONTINUING. INTERIOR MINISTER OCTAVIO LEPAGE HAS RETREATED FROM PREVIOUS CLAIMS THAT NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING CASE WAS "SOLVED," PERHAPS BECAUSE OF PRESIDENT PEREZ' OWN RELUCTANCE MARCH 6 TO ATTACH THIS LABEL TO THE CASE (CARACAS 2320). LEPAGE STATED MARCH 16 THAT THE CASE HAS BEEN "PARTIALLY SOLVED." HE CONFIRMED THAT THE RING LEADERS IN THE KIDNAPPING OF US INDUSTRIALIST WILLIAM NIEHOUS ARE NOW IN JAIL, BUT THAT THE POLICE INVESTIGATION WILL CONTINUE "TENACIOUSLY AND WITH PERSERVERANCE" UNTIL NIEHOUS IS FOUND.

5. UNITY OF THE LEFT PROPOSED. THE PUBLICATION MARCH 6 OF A STATEMENT BY A NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT VENEZUELAN LEFTISTS CALLING FOR UNITY OF THE LEFT AS THE ONLY MEANS OF COMBATING THE HEGEMONY OF VENEZUELA'S TWO LARGEST PARTIES, AD AND COPEI, HAS RECEIVED MIXED REVIEWS. SOME OF THE PROPOSAL'S SPONSORS MET MARCH 16 WITH THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE PEOPLE'S ELECTORAL MOVEMENT (MEP) PARTY, ONE OF SIX PARTIES ON THE LEFT OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A SINGLE LEFTIST PARTY OR CARRYING OUT A JOINT PROGRAM. AFTERWARD MEP PRESIDENT LUIS BELTRAN PRIETO SAID THAT MEP FAVORED THE IDEA OF A SINGLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LEFTIST PARTY, BUT HAD NO INTEREST IN ANY UNITY

EFFORT THAT WAS LESS THAN 100 PERCENT OR WAS DESIGNED TO LEND SUPPORT TO THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OF A PARTICULAR PARTY (AS TAE NEW FORCE, A SIMILAR LEFTIST COALITION, DID IN 1973). MEP SECRETARY GENERAL JESUS PAZ GALARRAGA POINTED OUT THAT THE MAIN STUMBLING BLOCK TO UNITY OF THE LEFT IS THE "SELF SUFFICIENCY OF SOME SECTORS OF THE LEFT," A NOT VERY VEILED REFERENCE TO THE MOVEMENT TO SOCIALISM (MAS) PARTY WHICH HAS REPEATEDLY SHIED AWAY FROM ANY LINKS WITH OTHER LEFTIST PARTIES. COMMENT: THE PUSH FOR A UNIFIED PARTY OF THE LEFT ARISES FROM THE FACT THAT MANY LEFTISTS, BOTH INDEPENDENTS AS WELL AS PARTY MEMBERS, ARE FRUSTRATED AT NOT BEING ABLE TO COMPETE ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH AD AND COPEI, WHICH GARNERED 84 PERCENT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE IN THE 1973 ELECTIONS. THERE IS A PERSISTENT BELIEF AMONG LEFTISTS THAT IF THEY COULD GET IT ALL TOGETHER, A POPULAR LEFTIST CANDIDATE WOULD BE ABLE TO ATTRACT VOTES AWAY FROM AD AND COPEI. THE PROBLEM IS THAT ALL OF THE LEFTIST PARTIES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MAS, ARE IN DECLINE. MAS, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS GAINING STRENGTH AND HAS HIGH HOPES OF RAISING ITS SHARE OF THE VOTE FROM 5 PERCENT, WHICH IT POLLED ITS FIRST TIME OUT IN 1973, TO 10 PERCENT OR MORE IN 1978. MAS BELIEVES IT IS THE LEFTIST WAVE OF THE FUTURE AND HAS NO DESIRE TO WATER DOWN ITS SEPARATE IDENTITY OR ITS GOALS FOR SHORT TERM ELECTORAL GAINS. GIVE THE MAS POSITION, CHANCES ARE THE LEFT WILL REMAIN AS DIVIDED AS IT IS NOW.

6. OTHER REPORTING THIS WEEK INCLUDED PRESIDENT PEREZ' ANNUAL ADDRESS TO CONGRESS (CARACAS 2641), INCLUDING HIS SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS (CARACAS 2737) AND HIS PRAISE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRESIDENT CARTER (CARACAS 2565), CIVAIR DISCUSSIONS ON USER CHARGES AND FUEL QUESTIONS, (CARACAS 2761) AND THE INTERNATIONAL AVIATION SAFETY CONFERENCE (CARACAS 2642). VAKY

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Message Attributes

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Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Review Media Identifier:
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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
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Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THIS WEEK IN VENEZUELA
TAGS: ENRG, PINS, PINT, PORG, US, VE, OPEC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0911eeb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
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22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009